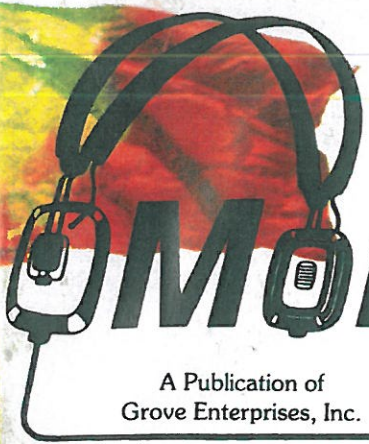




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**BBC
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*A Monitoring Times
Special Report*

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Monitoring Times

Monitoring the New Air Force

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By Larry Van Horn



The end of the cold war has also meant an end to political and military institutions that have been part of our lives throughout most of this century. On June 1st, with a simple lowering of their flags, TAC, SAC and MAC ceased to exist.

The reorganization of the Air Force has naturally brought with it some confusion (within the Air Force as well as to the hobbyist), but the shake-up provides new challenges and excitement for the monitor. In this special report, Van Horn explains the new Global HF System and the division of responsibilities within the unified US Strategic Command.

The Yardstick of Excellence: The BBC's World Service

By Jeff Chanowitz

No other broadcaster has attained the global recognition and respect achieved by the BBC's World Service in its 60 years of broadcasting. But even the venerable *Beeb* is being tested in these days of economic and political changes. *MT* looks at the BBC's past and its foreseeable future in a conversation with deputy director David Witherow.

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German Numbers Stations

By Nils Schiffhauer

Since unification, are German numbers stations gone but not forgotten? Hardly, says Schiffhauer, German journalist who tracked down the transmitter site for one mysterious station.

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COVER PHOTO: Chinese students in Beijing's Tiananmen Square bear a banner the BBC for its broadcasts. Photo courtesy BBC.

COVER
Photo
Courtesy
BBC

The Yardstick of Excellence:



The BBC's World Service

By Jeff Chanowitz

The chimes of Big Ben and the British tones of the announcer proclaiming "This is London" are indelible experiences connected with broadcasts of the BBC's World Service. With its superb entertainment and informational programs combined with comprehensive coverage of the late breaking news events throughout the globe, the BBC has become the yardstick of excellence by which all shortwave services are measured. Praised by former soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, the American hostages in Lebanon, and bedouin in Somalia, the reputation of the BBC is at an all time high.

To probe the secret of the BBC's success, *MT* talked to David Witherow, Deputy Director of the World Service. With a Cambridge education and over a decade's experience in international broadcasting, Witherow is typical of the highly qualified personnel who make the World Service what it is today. Despite having less transmitter power and fewer languages than its leading competitors, the BBC's esteemed reputation draws an audience that is estimated to be at least 120 million, a figure that does not include such countries as China where research cannot be conducted.



David Witherow, Deputy Managing Director, World Service.

60 Years of Global Service

Based in Bush House in Central London, the external service originated in 1932 as the BBC's Empire Service, with its main mission being to communicate with Great Britain's colonial empire. Yet, it wasn't until 1937, when fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia, that the service started to add languages and set journalistic standards.

Instrumental in the development of the BBC was Lord Reith, the services's first director. He continually fought with Britain's Foreign Office to achieve for the BBC's external service the freedom from government control that was enjoyed by the domestic services at that time.

From World War II to the present, the BBC has expanded the number of languages broadcast and changed its name quite a few times. In 1938, the BBC's Empire Service became the Overseas Service. In 1958, the name was changed to the BBC External Service, and in 1988, John Tusa, then managing director, officially renamed the service stating, "Increasingly, the title of the BBC External Service has sat in a clumsy and uncomfortable way around our shoulders... As far as everyone else is concerned, we have always been the BBC World Service."

The BBC in the Post Cold War Era

Today, with the ending of the Cold War, many shortwave critics have called for a reevaluation of the role of international broadcasting. Yet, Witherow discounts the effects of the ending of Communism stating, "Our role has never changed during or after the Cold War ... Our objective is to provide a credible news service backed up by good news analysis and a broad range of commentaries."

Yet, the breakup of the USSR is having an effect on the BBC. Witherow mentioned that the World Service is planning to add a Ukrainian and Uzbek service as a part of "increased coverage of the Eurasian region." He commented, "The World Service wants to continue to provide good, reliable news where it is most needed."

Despite the many changes taking place in the Eurasian region, the BBC has not ignored the listeners in the undeveloped nations. Witherow reaffirmed the BBC's intention to "continue to provide a good service to the Third World, which has a lot of need for good information."

Witherow emphasized the BBC's strong commitment to its broadcasts for the African continent, which includes increased programming in French, Hausa (spoken mainly in Nigeria) and Portuguese. For the Asian region, there will also be an expansion in its Chinese service "in the near future." Witherow added unequivocally, "All areas where there are strong BBC audiences in the Third World we will continue to serve."

A Worldwide Audience

Judging by the large numbers of devoted listeners in numerous countries throughout the globe, the BBC continues to be successful in providing listeners with programming that fulfills their needs. In Somalia, where a brutal civil war has taken over one-hundred thousand lives, the BBC has responded by providing program-



The Bush House newsroom where more than 200 daily news programs are prepared for broadcast in the BBC's World Service.



Ascension Island transmitter with dish.

ming that gives listeners vital information, which is heard by at least 41% of the population. So popular is the BBC's programming that a British anthropologist reported that while she was on a bus on route to Mogadishu, the Somali capital, the driver pulled off the road and turned off the engine so that all passengers could listen to the BBC.

One of the most popular programs on the Somali service is "Missing Persons," which is a program that puts listeners in touch with relatives who have gone abroad. On the program, desperate appeals from individuals are aired on a regular basis. Not uncommon are heart-rendering pleas such as this one: "Since my mother's house was destroyed, I do not know where she is. Tell my wife I'm alive... I do not know if my children have been killed."

The BBC's Vietnam service is also extremely popular. Many of the country's top communist leaders openly admit to listening and are proud of the English they have learned from the English lessons aired by the service. Ironically, ordinary people are arrested and put in jail for listening to the same broadcasts. Doung Dang, a college student who left Vietnam in 1988 for the United States and has been an avid DXer for many years, recalled the typical way of listening to the BBC was "to shut and lock the door to your room, turn out the light and listen to the BBC under the bed."

Judy Stowe, the Vietnam service's head, commented on the importance of shortwave service: "When Vietnamese have fled (as many have left in boats to Hong Kong) they've always clung to their radios."

In China, during the short-lived pro-democracy movement, students thought the BBC's service to be so important they publicly demonstrated their appreciation for the service by parading a banner in downtown Beijing stating, "Thank You BBC."

However, the importance of the BBC is exemplified best by one Russian listener who wrote a letter after the ill-fated Soviet coup stating, "I have listened to the BBC for the last 40 years, and I have been punished for that as have many other Soviet citizens during a certain period of our history, which is why it took me so long to write to you." He went on to state, "I am writing for the first and probably the last time to thank you for the moral support all these years."

Witherow described the letters from Russians, public statements of thanks from hostages coming out of Lebanon, and an unexpected en-

dorsement from Mikhail Gorbachev after the failed coup in 1991, as "testimonials that show how radio is truly the broadcast medium of the individual. It is a very human thing and it shows how important radio broadcasting is."

The BBC's Diverse Programming

One of the main components of the BBC's success and popularity is its programming. Witherow commented, "One of our strengths is our news and current affairs programs." Perhaps the best example of this programming is "News Hour," an award winning program that consists of world news, headlines, in-depth reports, business updates and features. Contrary to its name, "News Hour" has now has been augmented to three hours. Witherow commented that the reason for the program's expansion was to "have a one hour block for each potential time zone."

In addition to "Newshour," the BBC offers top-notch programming that is guaranteed to satisfy the most information-hungry listener. With the advantage of domestic service resources at its disposal, the BBC offers a variety of programs that range from in-depth business reports to features on sports, science, the environment and much more. The service even has a program about the BBC itself, which should be of special interest to shortwave enthusiasts. Called "Waveguide," the program allows SWLs to get more out of their BBC listening by presenting

historical, technical and program related information to listeners.

Despite its reputation for hard news, Witherow cautioned, "We don't want the tabloid service to neglect the cultural and high entertainment programs, where we have a high reputation." As an example, he added, "We will continue to be one of the few international services to do plays and high entertainment."

The BBC offers an impressive variety of music oriented programs that range from "Jazz for the Asking" to "Multi-Track," which highlights the British and Top-20 pop charts from around the world. The service also offers book reviews, quiz programs and dramas that were typical of the golden age of radio in the U.S.

Because so many programs are offered on the schedule, it is best to write for the program guide, *London Calling*. A yearly subscription is \$20 (U.S.). Write to: P.O. Box 76S, Bush House Strand, London, England, WC2B 4PH.

The Gulf War Tests the BBC's Objectivity

One of the key tests of the BBC's goal of objective news coverage was the 1991 Gulf War. During the conflict, the BBC expanded its coverage to a 24-hour war status. Correspondents were placed on the scene of the conflict, at the United Nations and at other strategic points to provide full and comprehensive coverage of the

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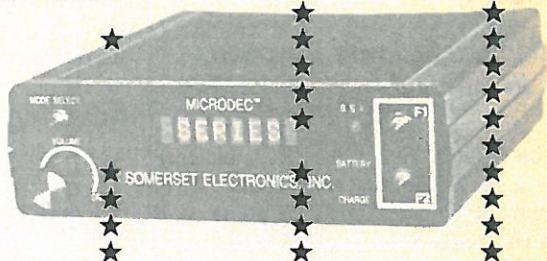
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Jonathan Birchall with Egyptian troops in the Gulf.

war. As the fighting erupted, the BBC's audience doubled in size. Witherow commented, "They turned to the BBC to hear what was going on, if they did not hear it from the BBC first."

During the early part of the conflict, the BBC was jammed by Iraq. Then, realizing that they could get their message out more effectively by providing their view point to the BBC, Iraq ended any interference with the BBC's signal.

In its attempt to remain objective, the BBC got complaints from both sides of the conflict. On the Iraqi side, Jordan's government complained that the BBC provided news that was slanted in favor of the allied forces, while the army on the allied side complained that the BBC was not backing their forces.

Yet, the fairness of the service's coverage was indicated by its popularity among American troops. On the aircraft carrier *Saratoga*, Admiral J.D. Williams, the commander of the Sixth Fleet stated, "It (the BBC) was our primary news source during the war." Also, on the battleship *Wisconsin*, the BBC World Service was deemed to be so important that it was piped through the ship 24-hours a day. When the service made a comprehensive evaluation of its Gulf War coverage, "What came out time after time was how good the coverage was," said Witherow.

BBC Monitoring

One of the ways the BBC evaluates its news coverage and that of its competition is through its one-hundred and fifty shortwave and satellite TV monitors, who listen and document radio and TV broadcasts of over 40 different countries. Called BBC Monitoring, the service records, transcribes and distributes information in publications such as *The Summary of World Broadcasts*, *Newsflashes*, and tailored packages that provide specific information on the movement of important commodities such as oil.

The World Service relies on BBC Monitoring as one of its sources for late breaking news developments and as a way to monitor other international broadcasters. Additionally, BBC Monitoring also has a network of world-wide

subscribers that range from news agencies (*Monitoring Times*, for one) to foreign embassies. With state of the art technology that would be a short-wave listener's dream, the multi-lingual monitors sit patiently in cubicals listening to broadcasts from its studios in Caversham, England.

The dedication of the BBC Monitoring Service's directors (which include Witherow) and staff who have been known to work around the clock during breaking world news stories is just one key element to the success of the service.

Adapting to Competition

Despite its programming successes, the BBC continues to innovate in the face of increasing competition for listeners. Using a new strategy of program placement on local stations as a supplement to its shortwave broadcasts, the BBC has become aggressive in its drive to gain a larger audience. So far this strategy has been fairly successful. With the service's agreement for distribution to over 120 radio stations in the U.S. via the American Public Radio Network, the BBC is the most popular international broadcaster in the United States.

Additionally, the C-Span Audio Networks offer a whole channel of BBC programming on a 24-hour basis. Beth Glatt, who heads the C-Span Audio Networks, (see the Dec. 1990 issue of *MT* for details about the audio networks) stated, "Many subscribers commented on our listener surveys that one of the reasons they wanted the audio networks was to receive the BBC with a digital quality signal." This strategy has been equally successful in Europe. In Finland, where the service had only 50,000 listeners, the use of rebroadcasting via local radio stations increased its audience more than tenfold.

However, the new policy does not affect shortwave. Witherow commented, "We will continue to be on HF as a major means of communication; it is still the most direct means of program placement." He added, unequivocally, "We will continue to be on HF even in places where there is a movement toward FM listening."

The BBC's commitment to shortwave is exemplified by its network of 80 transmitter sites that includes facilities in Ramisham (2x100 and 8x500 kW HF transmitters), Wooferton (6x250 and 4x300 kW HF transmitters), and Daventry (4x100 and 6x300 HF transmitters) in the U.K. In addition, the BBC also uses a number of relay stations in Hong Kong (2x500 kW), Lesotho (2x100 kW), Cyprus (4x100 and 4x250 kW), Singapore (5x250 and 1x250 kW), Antigua (2x250kW) and in North America via transmitters in Sackville, Canada; Bethany, Ohio; Greenville, NC; and Delano, California. With its extensive global network of transmission facilities backed up by satellites, it should be no



Terry Waite with Barbara Myers (Outlook).

surprise that the BBC "came in the best" when Gorbachev was trying to listen to shortwave stations during the coup.

The Future of International Broadcasting

As a part of the 50th anniversary of the VOA, the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., presented a forum on the future of international broadcasting. David Witherow, along with many other key players in shortwave broadcasting, took part in the discussion. Talking about the forum, Witherow commented, "We determined that there will be a need for international broadcasting in the future ... The question is how to supply that need and how to do that in the future with competition from TV and cable."

Witherow emphasized the factors associated with the future success of international broadcasters that were made evident during the discussion. One factor is "being available," which Witherow described as being in the right language at the right time. Also, "being attractive" is important. Witherow mentioned that attractive programs are "responsive to listener's needs." Moreover, for international broadcasters, "being accessible" is also a key and is defined as delivering international programs by the best means so that listeners will be able to receive them.

Most importantly, Witherow stated that broadcasters must "be aware," which he defined as "knowing your audience within each country." Witherow summed it up by saying, "Those who are successful in carrying out these factors will be the most successful international broadcasters in the future."

In the fast-changing world of shortwave broadcasting, where hundreds of services proliferate throughout the spectrum, only one service truly has global impact. While many broadcasters come and go, for shortwave listeners, it is comforting to know that one service has the tradition, foresight and reputation that is unique and indispensable in international broadcasting. For while there are many shortwave stations, there is only one BBC World Service.